

Message Text

SECRET

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E.O.11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE EUCOM MOVE TO BELGIUM

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1. DAVIGNON'S RAISING THE EUCOM RELOCATION ISSUE WAS AN ADVANCED WARNING THAT THE U.S. WAS CONSIDERING A PROJECT THAT WOULD CERTAINLY RAISE A MAJOR POLITICAL CONTROVERSY IN BELGIUM. HE WAS SAYING PLAINLY ENOUGH, IF THERE ARE NOT IMPORTANT STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES IN THE MOVE, WHICH CAN BE SHOWN TO STRENGTHEN THE SECURITY OF THE ALLIANCE AND OF BELGIUM, DON'T DO IT. WE LEAVE IT TO OTHERS TO ASSESS THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES TO BE GAINED. HERewith OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE POLITICAL RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES WHICH WOULD ENSUE IN BELGIUM.

2. DAVIGNON CORRECTLY DESCRIBED, IN OUR JUDGMENT, THE NATURE OF THE POLITICAL ISSUE WHICH THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD FACE. TINDEMANS' MAJORITY IS NARROW AND SHAKY. NOT ONLY THE OPPOSITION BUT SOME OPPORTUNISTS WITHIN HIS GIVERNMENT WISH TO BRING IT DOWN. EUCOM RELOCATION - HEAVY WITH EMOTIONAL OVER-
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 00062 041802Z

TONES FOR ENVIRONMENT ENTHUSIASTS, NEUTRALISTS, ANTI-AMERICANS, BAN-THE-BOMBERS AND NEW LEFTISTS - WOULD BE AN ISSUE THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PARTISAN OPPONENTS SIMPLY COULD NOT LET LAY. TINDEMANS WOULD BE RELUCTANTLY DRAGGED INTO A FUNDAMENTAL DEBATE OVER THE NATION'S SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS AND NATIONAL INTERESTS. IT WOULD BE A DEFENSIVE STRUGGLE IN WHICH THE BEST OUTCOME WOULD ONLY LEAVE BELGIUM WHERE IT ALREADY IS - COMMITTED

TO THE NATO SYSTEM. WE CANNOT BE SURE THAT THE ORDEAL WE WOULD IMPOSE ON THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT SOUR OUR PRESENT EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH BELGIUM. AS DAVIGNON INDICATED, WE HAD BETTER CONVINCE THE BELGIANS THAT IT WOULD BE WORTH IT.

3. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO MAKE A FLAT FORECAST WHETHER THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT WOULD STAND OR FALL IF EUCOM RELOCATION WERE BROACHED. THE TIMING AND MANNER IN WHICH THE ISSUE WOULD BE RAISED WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT. TINDEMANS STAGGERED THROUGH A SMALL CABINET CRISIS IN DECEMBER AND ANOTHER ASSAULT UPON HIS WEARY MINISTRY IS WIDELY PREDICTED FOR FEBRUARY OR MARCH. A DIVISIVE "FOREIGN POLICY" ISSUE IS NOT WHAT TINDEMANS NEEDS THIS WINTER. JUST TWO YEARS AGO A NARROWER DEFENSE ISSUE - THE CHOICE OF A FIGHTER PLANE TO REPLACE THE F-104'S - BECAME ENSNARED IN DOMESTIC POLITICS AND HAD A THEN STRONGER TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IN TROUBLE.

4. WE SEE NO WAY TO AVOID A PUBLIC DEBATE ON EUCOM RELOCATION. THE GOVERNMENT ASSURED PARLIAMENT IN 1966 THAT, IF NATO AND SHAPE WERE RECEIVED, NO OTHER FOREIGN MILITARY BASES WOULD BE PERMITTED ON BELGIAN TERRITORY. IT IS TRUE THAT SOME NEW U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN PERMITTED SINCE THEN IN BELGIUM. BUT IN EACH CASE THE GOVERNMENT CONCLUDED THAT NO OTHER FOREIGN BASE PER SE WAS INVOLVED. EUCOM, BEING LARGE, POPULOUS AND HIGH LEVEL, COULD NOT BE SIMILARLY FINESSED. ITS COMING WOULD HAVE TO BE DEFENDED ON ITS MERITS.

5. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL ARGUMENT THAT PUTTING THE TOP U.S. COMMAND POST IN BELGIUM WOULD INSURE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 00062 041802Z

THE COUNTRY BEING BLOWN TO KINGDOM COME SHOULD A WAR START. IT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO HANDLE THE MORE SUBTLE AND, PERHAPS, MORE POTENT OBJECTION THAT BELGIUM WOULD BECOME WILLY-NILLY HOSTAGE TO U.S. MILITARY DECISIONS ON MATTERS FAR BEYOND NATO'S KEN. BELGIUM DEPENDS ON ARAB OIL AND IS THUS HYPER-SENSITIVE TO MIDEAST DEVELOPMENTS. IT WOULD BE POLITICALLY DIFFICULT TO EXPOSE THE COUNTRY TO POTENTIAL PENALTIES FOR ACTS THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT HAD NO VOICE IN. EUCOM'S RESPONSIBILITIES BEYOND THE NATO AREA WOULD POSE A REAL PROBLEM FOR THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS COULD RESULT IN BELGIAN INSISTENCE ON LIMITATIONS ON THE FREEDOM OF ACTION OF A RELOCATED EUCOM THAT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO US.

6. APART FROM THESE GENERAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS, THERE ARE TWO SPECIFIC FACTORS THAT DESERVE CONSIDERATION.

7. WE NEED MORE INFORMATION BEFORE COMMENTING ON WHAT WEIGHT TO GIVE TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT AN ADDITIONAL 2,000 TO 3,000 AMERICANS IN THE MONS-CASTEAU AREA WOULD PROVIDE AN ADVANTAGEOUS

ECONOMIC STIMULUS TO THE AREA. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE OF A NATURE AND SIZE SUFFICIENT TO OFFSET THE IMPACT OF SUCH A SUBSTANTIAL "IMMIGRATION" UPON LOCAL RENTS, TRAFFIC, UTILITIES AND SERVICES AND ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THAT LARGELY RURAL AREA.

8. A NEW US-BELGIAN AGREEMENT, APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT, WOULD BE NECESSARY TO PERMIT THE RELOCATION OF EUROM TO BELGIUM. THAT AGREEMENT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO DEFINE THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES FOR EUROM PERSONNEL AND DEPENDENTS. OUR AIM WOULD BE TO GET FOR EUROM PERSONNEL STATUS AS ADVANTAGEOUS AS THAT PRESENTLY ACCORDED SHAPIRO PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, OUR RECENT EXPERIENCES IN NEGOTIATING WITH THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT ON SIMILAR ISSUES INDICATE THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE LENGTHY, DIFFICULT AND WITHOUT ASSURANCES OF ULTIMATE SUCCESS.

9. IF THE U.S. DECIDES TO RELOCATE EUROM, WE WOULD NEED TO MAKE OUR BASIC APPROACH TO THE BELGIANS ON THE BASIS OF OVER-
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BRUSSE 00062 041802Z

RIDING STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES. TACTICALLY, WE SHOULD APPROACH THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WHEN IT IS RELATIVELY STRONG. THIS COULD OCCUR IF TINDEMANS MOVES DURING 1977 TO DRAW THE SOCIALIST PARTY INTO HIS COALITION (WHICH A GOOD MANY TINDEMANS SUPPORTERS ARE URGING) OR IF A STRENGTHENED TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT EMERGES FROM NATIONAL ELECTIONS. RENNER

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